

THE IMPACT OF YOUNG AND NEW OFFICERS  
WITHIN THE CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the  
Executive Fire Officer Program.

June 2006

## Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another,

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Abstract

The Charleston Fire Department had officers that were young, did not have considerable seniority or significant time in rank. The purpose of this research was to access, study and plan for relative impacts.

The questions, what factors led to these officers and how did formal education, training and prior experience impact promotion, how have these issues been managed and what impacts have been experienced and how have these officers impacted morale, training and the workplace from management and employee views, found increased turnover with little training and education were primary issues.

Descriptive research was used through literature review, surveys of employees and interviews with recently promoted officers and administrative staff. Recommendations were made to improve officer training, formal education and experience levels.

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## Introduction

The work force across the United States has changed significantly over the past decade, a change that has reflected the changes in our society. The fire service, like many other industries and professions has been slow to recognize these changes and is now playing catch-up to adapt to a changing work force. The Charleston Fire Department (CFD), due to these changes, is coping with an influx of younger and newer firefighters and consequently, younger and less experienced officers. Although these younger employees and officers are slightly higher educated by formal education, they are considerably less experienced in regards to actual emergency operations. On the job experience levels have also become reduced by a national trend of reduced fire related responses, although EMS responses are increasing.

Within the last 2 years CFD hired 27 new employees (13.8 % of the workforce) and promoted 25 officers (26% of the officer core). At the time of this applied research paper, CFD was undergoing a major change in administration. The Fire Chief, Grant K. Gunnoe, had retired and testing was underway to determine his replacement. The interim Chief was on a 90 day appointment and had the civil service rank of Assistant Chief. Once the new Chief is named, he will also be new to the position for neither of the two candidates possess previous Fire Chief experience. Additionally, within the past two years, CFD promoted 4 employees to Assistant Chief, 8 to the rank of Captain and 13 to the rank of Lieutenant. The fire department is also expecting another three to five Captain retirements within the next 6 months that would lead to the promotion of an additional six to ten officers.

These figures demonstrate that the Charleston Fire Department had many officers that were young, did not have significant seniority with CFD nor significant time in their respective positions. For a variety of reasons, the organization had many young officers and officers with

new roles and responsibilities. The members of the fire department have struggled with balancing inexperience, training issues and leadership changes.

The purpose of this applied research project was to evaluate the various impacts of young and new officers to the fire department, to firefighters and to the community. This research will allow the fire department to access, plan for and minimize these impacts in the future.

Information was obtained by using literature review, a survey of all CFD employees and interviews with all officers promoted within the last two years and all administrative officers. The descriptive research method was used for this research project and the following questions were answered.

1. What factors have led to young and inexperienced officers and how has formal education, training and prior experience impacted the promotion of new officers?
2. How has the Charleston Fire Department managed this issue and what impacts have been experienced by the infusion of younger and lesser experienced officers?
3. How have “young” and new officers impacted morale, training and the overall workplace environment from the perspectives of both management and the fire department membership?

### Background and Significance

Over the past few years during informal conversation around Charleston (WV) firehouses, comments have been made that the department is the youngest it has ever been. These discussions can easily be justified when looking at the average seniority and age among the employees of CFD, although, due to limited data, it was difficult to accurately compare those figures to past seniority and age statistics.

Topics discussed in Unit 1 (Leadership), Unit 3 (Change Management) and Unit 7 (Organizational Culture and Change) of the National Fire Academy's (NFA) Executive Development (ED) course led to the need to address the cultural, educational and experience levels encountered with an influx of new employees and the promotion of young and less experienced officers. This is an issue that had rarely surfaced in the past, but has recently emerged as a common occurrence. Information obtained through this research will support the United States Fire Administration (USFA) goal to respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues.

The Charleston Fire Department protects West Virginia's capitol city of 33 square miles and is home to 53,000 residents with an ISO rating of 2 and a FY 2006 budget of \$13,445,074. Additionally, the population in the City of Charleston quickly swells with the influx of commuters going to work, shopping or participating in leisure activities and traveling. CFD is essentially an all-hazard response organization capable of fire suppression, emergency medical transport, various rescues, hazardous materials and countless other requests for emergency assistance. Shift personnel work the standard 24 / 48 firefighter schedule with a compensation shift (Kelley Day) off every eighth shift.

On June 26, 1996, The Charleston Fire Department experienced a major change in both demographics and operations when the City of Charleston merged the Charleston Emergency Ambulance Service (CEAS) into the Charleston Fire Department. This merger transferred all capital assets, operations and forty-four personnel into the fire department. As part of the transfer, all forty-four CEAS personnel were given the rank of firefighter and their seniority for promotional testing was determined to be June 26, 1996.

Prior to the merger, the fire department was staffed with 154 employees with many having greater than 20 years of service (estimated figures were more than 15% of the workforce). Two years later in September 1998, after all former CEAS employees had completed the required firefighter training; they were placed on 24 hour shifts and began a dual role duty of working on an ambulance and on fire apparatus. This move resulted in an infusion of several firefighters with limited seniority and experience riding fire apparatus and performing firefighter duties.

Currently, the Charleston Fire Department has nine stations, one training center and an administrative office. CFD operates with three 24 hour shifts with a minimum staffing of 47 personnel on duty per shift. These 47 personnel operate 9 engine companies, 2 ladder trucks, 2 rescue trucks, 4 ALS ambulances, one Paramedic Supervisor, one Safety/Training officer and one Shift Commander per shift. CFD has made very few changes in the rank structure since the 1996 merger resulting in the following ranks on shift duty (minimum staffing); one Assistant Chief (Shift Commander), 12 Captains, 13 Lieutenants and 21 Firefighters . The Asst. Chief has ultimate responsibility and authority for all on-duty operations. One Captain is assigned to the duties of training officer and functions as the designated safety officer on all significant emergency scenes. The other 11 Captains function as Company Officers on the nine engine companies and the two ladder trucks, with the engine company Captains responsible for their respective stations. Lieutenants are considered driver/operators on the 9 engines, 2 ladders and 2 rescue trucks. All other personnel are the rank of firefighter including the 4 ambulance crews and the paramedic supervisor.

In the absence of the regular officer(s) there are three manners in which the position is filled. Swing officers may fill the vacancy; these officers are generally the newest promoted



officers per shift awaiting a chance for a permanent assignment. In addition to several firefighters assigned to “swing”, there are at least 2 swing Lieutenants and 1 swing Captain assigned to each shift.

Once all swing personnel are assigned to cover Kelley shifts, vacations and sick leave, overtime can be called and an officer of equal rank from another shift may cover the vacancy. Additionally, another member of a lesser rank may fill-in or “step-up” into the vacancy and temporarily “act” in that position. Acting officers are given a temporary pay adjustment for the rank that they are acting in. Firefighters may “step-up” to Lieutenant, Lieutenants may “step-up” to Captain and Captains may “step-up” to Asst. Chief.

The Charleston Fire Department operates under a Civil Service Commission with five tested ranks. All ranks from Firefighter to Chief are tested by a written exam. CFD hires firefighters from the public and all other ranks are filled internally. The fire department is budgeted for 198 personnel currently comprised of one Chief, five Assistant Chiefs, 41 Captains, 49 Lieutenants and 99 Firefighters. At present, there are three firefighter vacancies and three personnel on active military duty. In addition to the 24 hour shift, there are nine personnel assigned to day shift, this is comprised of the Chief, two Assistant Chiefs, one Captain, two Lieutenants and three Firefighters, their duties include training, fire prevention, public education and various administrative functions.

Hiring and promotional processes are governed by WV State Law. In order to be eligible to test for Lieutenant a firefighter must have completed the Apprenticeship program which begins on the date of hire and lasts a period of three years. All other ranks require at least two years of time in grade (rank) to be eligible to test for the next rank. During the promotional testing process, 70% of the overall score is comprised of the written exam score and 30% of the

score is seniority. Both scores are weighted so that the individual with the highest exam score receives 70 points and the most senior individual receives 30 points. All other test scores are weighted to the top score and seniority is weighted from the individual with the highest seniority. This results in a varied scoring range that must be calculated individually for each test. A test may only be given when there is a vacancy for that rank and the test scores are good for three years or until the list reaches the mandatory cut-off of 70% of the overall score.

During the West Virginia Legislative Session of 2003, career fire departments with EMS transport duties were given the authority to require paramedic certification to be eligible to take the entrance exam for hiring. Up until that time, no prior experience or certifications were required to apply for the Charleston Fire Department.

Since 1996, there have been four legal action suits filed in the Kanawha County Court system that could have made a significant impact on the promotional process. No major changes were made after the first two cases were decided upon and the other two are currently in litigation. Additionally, in early 2001, there was an interest in changing the promotional process to 60% test score and 40% seniority, this interest was taken to a vote by the International Association of Fire Fighters - Local 317 members and no changes were made. Local 317 currently represents all but one of the firefighters who have completed their one year probationary period but does not have arbitration and negotiating rights.

Once hired by the Charleston Fire department, there are essentially three manners in which one may leave. An employee may claim a full retirement after 20 years of service in which they receive a 60% pension, during the next ten years of service the percentage is adjusted by year so that after 25 years the pension is 70% and after 30 years the pension is 75%. Seventy-five percent (30 years) is the maximum pension percentage one may claim, although an

employee may not be forced to retire until the age of 65. In order to collect the full pension, one must be at least 50 years old. Additionally an employee with greater than 5 years of service may be granted a medical disability which is no more than 60% of the previous year's salary and there is no age requirement. Finally, an individual may outright resign and essentially quit. Although being fired is always an option, this is rare and has not been seen within the last 10 years.

Training and education falls under an Assistant Chief (Chief of Operations) and includes 2 personnel on day shift and the "on-shift" training/safety officer. Training personnel on day shift primarily focus on EMS training and the "on-shift" training Captain focuses on fire related training. Training performed "in-house" by CFD is primarily job related and can be considered in-servicing of basic skills and knowledge. Occasionally courses are conducted from outside training agencies and may be taught by certified instructors from within CFD or by instructors from the sponsoring agency.

On rare occasions, individuals may be sent to training outside the organization. Due to budget restraints and the cost of overtime incurred to cover the shift of the absent employee, traveling outside to obtain training is uncommon.

Upon being hired by CFD, all new employees are required to go through a 7 week training program in which they are certified to a minimum of Firefighter I and II, Hazardous Materials Operations and Emergency Medical Technician – Basic before being released to shift assignment. All new employees also begin the WV Firefighters Apprenticeship Program which is a three year program that includes monthly lessons, skill stations and on the job training. Many colleges and universities in WV accept this three year program and award 43 transfer

credit hours towards an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) in Occupational Development degree.

Several years ago, prior to June 1996, Charleston Fire Department participated in a program sponsored by West Virginia State College (WVSC) in which a college instructor conducted various formal education courses on site at the fire department. This program was primarily basic college core courses such as English, Math, etc. A few CFD employees participated in this program and were able to achieve this A.A.S. degree; many others participated but did not complete a degree. This program has not been conducted in the past 10 years.

Charleston is also the county seat of Kanawha County, West Virginia's largest county. Within Kanawha County and aside from CFD there are 5 paid fire departments, 21 volunteer fire departments and one paid ambulance service. Surrounding Kanawha County are areas containing several other paid and volunteer emergency service organizations. CFD does not have a residency requirement for employment and has hired several firefighters that have had considerable experience with many of these other organizations.

### Literature Review

Literature review for this Applied Research Project included text publications, periodicals, internet searches, documents prepared by the Charleston Fire Department, United States Fire Administration and the National Fire Academy and Applied Research Projects written by Executive Fire Officer Program participants.

Topics researched for this report included statistical information about the Charleston Fire Department. Information was also obtained relating to the various generations in the

workforce and defining those different age groups. Specific details about traits, habits and personalities were reviewed. Various training manuals were beneficial in obtaining information on specific training programs designed to meet defined goals.

Further topics reviewed included information on officer training programs and specifically, the promotion of new officers. Research into mentoring programs also added material used in this paper. Other topics related to training and formal (college) education was researched including how it is viewed by the fire service.

Statistical information was obtained to demonstrate the demographics and operations of the Charleston Fire Department all of which have made and will continue to make major impacts on the promotion of young and new officers and the relative “inexperience” associated with some of those officers. These statistics related to department finances, training, staffing, responsibilities and general operations. Information relating specifically to the employees included age, seniority, rank structure and laws that were pertaining to employment and promotion. The majority of this information is included in the Background and Significance, Results and Appendix sections of this research paper.

Considerable information was obtained about various generations and age groups that are currently active in today’s workforce. Tulgan (2000) explains that Generation X is Americans born between 1963 and 1977 and Generation Y is those born between 1978 and 1983. Zemke, Raines & Filipczak (2000) further adds that Generation X was preceded by the Baby Boomer generation, those born between 1943 and 1960. Broken into actual ages Baby Boomers are (as of the date and purpose of this paper) those over the age of 44. Generation X includes those between the ages of 29 and 43 while Generation Y are those 28 years old and younger. Zemke et al. (2000) refers to Generation Y as Nexters. On June 01, 2006, Charleston Fire Department had

51 Baby Boomers, 21 Nexters and 123 Generation X employees. Evidence is mounting that this mix is not a happy one (Karp, Fuller, & Sirias, 2002, p.7).

Generation Y has only recently began entering the workforce while the Baby Boomers are retiring and quickly leaving the fire service workforce. This has left Generation X as an in-between group transitioning into management and ultimate responsibility while also working along side those of two different generations. Zemke et al. (2000) describes unique work ethics, different perspectives on work, distinct and preferred ways of managing and being managed, idiosyncratic styles, and unique ways of viewing such work-world issues as quality, service, and, well...just showing up for work.

Although, Generation X has been greatly stereotyped, these employees possess traits “although unique” that can be contributed to the Baby Boomer and Veteran generations. Many of these traits are apparent in the day to day operations and culture of the fire department and that can be contributed to the fact that nearly all officers now being promoted to Lieutenant and Captain are of that generation. Care should also be taken when discussing traits and ethics to consider one’s overall life experience and maturity levels. Some Nexters have families and countless responsibilities while some Gen-Xers have always lived alone with very few life concerns and challenges.

But there is more to being a company officer than managing emergency situations (Smoke, 2005); is definitely an accurate statement and one that describes many of the impacts now being experienced by CFD. A review of *Company Officer* and *Fire Department Company Officer* text contents do address many of these issues that relate to “non-emergency” situations. Although both texts provide an excellent review for general leadership, unfortunately, they only scratch the surface of dealing with personnel issues and daily station living matters. That

training comes from considerable on the job and trial and error learning that only comes with experience. College courses that are routinely included in most Associate degree programs such as Sociology, Psychology and Interpersonal Communications provide considerable information in creating a much stronger base for understanding the basic essentials of leadership.

Addressing general fire department related issues, both texts again provide an excellent base for many of the all-around issues that officers routinely encounter and there is considerable information included that takes years to obtain while only working one out of every three days. Although the officer texts may lack a little in actual fire ground tactics, they are very beneficial to all officers because of the well-rounded content provided. Many new officers seem to focus on the search for information about tactics and do not give as much thought to the other 90% of their time. The hardest and most difficult task a company officer faces has nothing to do with the fireground (Sargent, 2001, p.58). Courage on the fireground isn't nearly as difficult to muster as it is in dealing with a personnel issues (Tobia, 2004). Leadership is not easy to learn and many people subconsciously shy away from it. Good leadership qualities are also learned from good leaders; too many times poor leaders demonstrate poor leadership skills.

Developing officers is a difficult and lengthy process that must be well planned to be successful over time. Dunne (2005) said nobody is "born" an officer. Becoming one is a gradual process that requires developing a number of skills and adapting to unfamiliar changes (Dunne, 2005).

Mentoring, formal and informal, has proven successful in many different areas. Meyers (2004) suggested mentoring should become part of the culture of the department. Informal mentoring programs can be successful, but considerable planning and structure should be used to make it efficient and consistent. Among the problems that have been encountered with mentor

programs were protégés with hidden agendas, a lack of incentives for mentors, and no organizational guidelines (Stone, 1998).

Smith (2002) says a mentor should act as a role model for recruits. Mentoring should begin early in one's career and progress with their career (Smith, 2002). Further down the line, a mentor also can provide information to help firefighters transition from the rank-and-file to the officer ranks (Smith, 2002). A good follower will further grow into a good leader and pass the baton onto the next generation.

The fire service in general does not prepare future officers well enough through officer training programs. Unfortunately, the fire service is famous for promoting people from a labor to leadership role overnight with little to no training or preparation for a role as a company officer (Sargent, 2001, p. 51). If a firefighter aspired to become a company officer, it was left to that person to basically figure it out what type of training they needed to promote to a company officer position (Podgorski, 2001). Many times, officer training programs do not begin until one is promoted. The fire service should expect that today's new hire will likely become an officer and begin that preparation. A common phrase heard in the fire station "just think, that guy could be Chief some day" needs to be taken more seriously and literally.

Officer training programs, all too often, focus on fire-related knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) and do not address the more common and essential issues of leadership. Fire departments need to place greater emphasis on intellectual leadership education.

Cody (2002) found at the local level, many fire departments are developing and implementing officer development programs, but most current programs do not utilize the basic tenets of leadership development promoted by experts in the field of leadership development. Most programs contain a series of technical training courses but very few



utilize assessment processes, job rotation, and/or mentoring to help candidates learn from their experiences over time. And while most fire departments have recognized the need for succession planning, few organizations have developed and/or implemented a comprehensive leadership development program or career development guide.

Formal education, although on the rise with younger employees, has not been well accepted and promoted by the fire service leaders of the past. Many times, veteran firefighters have stated that a college degree never put out a fire (Brawner, 1998, p. 7). Formalized training for our potential company officers has been lacking in the history of the fire service (Tabacco, 1996). Some of those reasons are still present today; financial concerns, time restraints, family responsibilities and apprehension are very prevalent concerns with the “non-traditional” student. These issues can be reduced with pro-active administrations and innovative planning.

Material discovered through the works of others clearly demonstrates that the issues faced by the Charleston Fire Department are common to many other fire departments and likewise, departments routinely struggle addressing them. These emerging issues and challenges emphasize the need to assess and better plan for the promotion of young and lesser experienced officers by improving training, formal education and experience levels.

### Procedures

Descriptive research procedures were used in this applied research project and consisted of Literature review, surveys and interviews with those promoted within the last two years and interviews with CFD administration.

Literature review consisted of internet searches, research of periodical and text publications and previous Applied Research Projects on file in the Learning Resource Center at

the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Publications were also obtained from the author's personal library and the administrative library of the Charleston Fire Department.

Literature review was used to gain statistical information on the fire department, training course descriptions, officer training programs of other fire departments, information on "mentoring" programs, publications relating to young or new officers, formal education of officers and information on various age groups.

A survey was conducted of all members of the Charleston Fire Department by visiting all nine fire stations on different shifts and gaining input from members on duty. Of the 195 employees, 153 (78.5.3%) surveys were completed in person and 32 (16.4%) via telephone for a total of 185 (94.9%). Basic information regarding age and seniority for all employees was obtained with assistance from the Fire Chief's office and Local 317. The surveys were used to gather data and statistics of the current Charleston Fire Department employees. The approach of visiting and interacting with all members of the fire department provided a hands on and personable survey which allowed employees the opportunity to freely discuss matters that could not be easily answered in survey questions. A great majority of employees were very open and provided considerable information about the impact of a younger workforce, "new" officers and specifically the promotional process. Survey questions were designed to gain information and stimulate conversations about age, formal (college) education, seniority, promotional processes, officer related training, previous experience prior to being hired by CFD and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) experience.

Interviews were conducted with all of the 25 officers promoted within the last two years (excluding the author) and 8 of the 10 administrative officers. Also, the President of Local 317 was interviewed with administrative questions. The interviews performed with the "new"

officers asked the same set of nine questions, while interviews with administrative personnel were asked a different set of 14 questions. The interviews with “new” officers averaged 21 minutes while interviews with administrative personnel averaged 64 minutes.

### *Limitations and Variances*

The survey used to gather data from all CFD members contained questions that were not used in this Applied Research Project. During pre-research preparation, several employees of CFD had expressed interest in pursuing or completing a formal education. With the concept that all individuals would supply data, the decision was made to gain information that may be used at a later time to assist those individuals who want to complete a degree.

An additional complication was designing a “well-rounded” survey that could be completed by all ranks, some questions were difficult for some employees to answer and therefore left unanswered. Frequently, many individuals were reluctant to place a name on the survey and a few did want to supply information that they felt was too personal. Another limitation discovered was the inability of participants to accurately remember certain statistics such as dates and college courses completed, this resulted in a failure to compare length of time in rank “time in grade”.

Due to various reasons, a very limited number of employees were not surveyed because of an inability to meet or contact them. Even with this complication, a high percentage of surveys (94.9%) were completed and allowed for very accurate results

The “new officer” interview questions were also designed in an attempt to cover three different ranks with different responsibilities. Some of the questions were not relevant to all three ranks, but still provided excellent results. A few of those interviewed were the newest of

the promoted officers with only a few weeks in their new positions and were not able to give qualitative answers do to their limited experience in the position.

Statistical information gathered for 21 employees (the remaining employees that were merged into CFD on June 26, 1996) are slightly misleading. These employees were given new payroll numbers and were essentially hired as new employees and given the rank of firefighter. Many of these employees were over the minimum hiring age of 35 years old and their seniority “hire date” was changed to 06-26-96. Although, many were able to retain their original CEAS hire dates for retirement and pension purposes. This means their seniority may show 9.91 years (as of the date of this paper), but many now have 20 years of (combined) service and are eligible to retire.

## Results

In summary, extensive data was collected on a very wide range of issues that can be directly related to younger and “newer” officers. These issues are leading to an overall culture change within the department.

The primary factor leading to younger officers is a younger workforce with veteran leaders leaving the department earlier than years past. Other factors such as college education, training and previous experience and personal ambition have also led to this trend. Inexperience can be linked to a shift in overall operations, EMS calls are on the rise and fire related responses are down partly because safer buildings have fewer fires. Inexperience can also be linked to seniority, the more days at work, the more situations dealt with and more experience gained. Formal education has helped develop a more rounded officer and has given a few officers an extra edge by teaching self-learning and study skills. Extensive training has helped prepare

officers in advance and at times have reduced the learning curve for new information. Prior experience has helped improve comfort levels on the job and has made the transition to officer easier.

The Charleston Fire Department has only recently begun managing the issue of younger and experienced officers mostly because it is an issue that has only recently become visible. The current administration under the leadership of retired Chief Gunnoe has developed mechanisms to address many of the negative impacts found and build upon the numerous strengths of having younger officers. Challenging issues of poor decision-making, relaxed discipline and questioning of authority can be overcome with training and education. Strengths of increased energy, vigor and training desires can be used to make the department more proactive and safer.

Morale has improved with the increase in youthful energy and the desire to be proactive. Training, although stressed at the present, will lead to greater efficiency and safety. The workplace has become a little more enjoyable and should have a positive influence on the overall culture change.

### *Employee Surveys*

The process of contacting and interacting with all employees was beneficial to this research for multiple reasons and greatly improved the ability to gain additional data. Charleston Fire Department currently has 195 employees of which, surveys were completed in person by 153 (78.5%) and another 32 (16.4%) by telephone for a total of 185 (94.87%), of this number four Captains, two Lieutenants and four firefighters were missed. Although the 100% goal was not achieved, a significant number was completed resulting in very accurate statistics. All statistics were based upon June 01, 2006. Detailed graphs and charts relating to the survey can be found in the Appendices.

Several CFD demographical statistics were obtained relating to age, seniority, EMS certification level, formal (college) education and previous experience.

The rank structure currently is one Assistant Chief acting as the interim Fire Chief, five Assistant Chiefs, 41 Captains, 49 Lieutenants and 99 Firefighters. The average age of all employees was 37.7 years old and average seniority for all employees was 9.9 years. Ironically, the CEAS merger happened 9 years and 11 months ago. Breaking down age and seniority figures into categories of rank showed that the average age of Firefighters to be 34.8 years old with an average seniority of 5.58. Lieutenants resulted in an average age of 37.8 and an average seniority of 11.65 years of service. The rank of Captain was an average of 42.9 years old with an average seniority of 16.4 years. The six Asst. Chiefs (including the acting Fire Chief) had an average age of 48.2 with average seniority being 22.9 years on the department. The age of employees ranged from 22 to 51 years old, with a seniority range of 7 months to 27 years and 9 months. CFD had six female employees (3%); one of which was a Lieutenant and five of which were paramedics.

Hiring and employment statistics after the EMS transition in June 1996 showed that 97 employees have been hired over the past 9 years and 11 months and during that time 98 employees have left the department. Cyclic hiring practices were also noted in which various sizes of hiring classes were easily seen. Hiring groups ranged from 3 to 16. Departures were broken down to discover that 54 employees had retired on full pensions, 18 were granted medical disability pensions and 26 had resigned. To further demonstrate the increased promotional opportunities to be experienced by CFD employees, in September 2006, 28 employees will be eligible to retire (20 years of service) although a few were over 50 years of age, 24 of the 28 will

become 50 within the next three years. This statistic shows that CFD should experience a similar number of hiring and promotions within an upcoming three year window.

Cyclic hiring of large groups were noted to have an impact by several people reaching retirement status at or about the same time thus creating multiple promotions and hiring within short periods of time.

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) certification levels resulted in 110 Emergency Medical Technicians - Basic (EMT), 46 EMT-Paramedics, 34 First Responders and 4 trained to the First Aid / CPR level. As of June 1, 2006, four EMTs had completed the paramedic program and were going through the certification process and an additional 8 EMTs were undertaking paramedic training.

College education levels (in this report called formal education and based upon 185 surveys) demonstrated that 30 (16.2 %) employees had completed an Associates degree, 32 (17.3 %) had completed a Bachelors degree and 2 had completed a Master's degree. The research also showed that an additional 66 (35.7%) employees had attended some college courses. The statistics were also broken down into rank to show that one Assistant Chief currently holds an Associate degree and two hold Baccalaureate degrees while one Asst. Chief had attended some college. The Captain ranks include 10 (27.07%) Associates degrees and 5 (13.5%) Bachelors degrees with 11 (29.7%) reporting some college education. The 47 Lieutenants surveyed account for 6 (12.8%) Associates, 8 (17%) Bachelors and one Masters degree with 12 (25.5%) listing some college. Of the 95 Firefighters, 13 (13.7%) hold an Associates degree and 17 (17.9%) had completed a Bachelors with one possessing a masters degree; 42 (44.2%) of the firefighters reported that they had attended some college.

Department wide there were 69 (37.3%) interested in completing an Associates degree while another 16 would like to finish a Baccalaureate degree and 9 were interested in pursuing a Masters degree.

Two questions on the survey inquired about the benefit of formal education. The first question, “Do you feel formal education has helped you in your job?” showed that 104 employees said yes while 33 said no. Many discussed that college classes do not help in fighting fire or performing EMS, but agreed that some classes do make an impact in other areas. Classes such as English help with writing and documentation, while classes like Interpersonal Communications, Psychology and Sociology helped to build a basis for dealing with people.

The second question, “Do you feel formal education has helped you in studying for tests?” resulted in similar response, 103 yes and 31 no. A clear majority of those that said yes reported that college classes help teach, develop and improve study skills and habits, reading comprehension and test taking ability.

The next two questions related to comfort levels and also showed intriguing results. The first question was an attempt to gauge their current comfort level in their position and the second question was to gauge their preparedness (comfort) level when they were promoted. Only officer’s levels are discussed here. Among the officers, 24 reported moderately comfortable, 39 reported high and 19 reported very high at the time of the survey. At the time of their promotion, one reported very low, 18 reported low, 45 reported moderate, 21 reported high and only 4 reported very high. More detailed analysis can be found in figure H.2. Some officers reported that their comfort level was a direct result of previous employment and life experiences.

Charleston Fire Department has in the past sent employees to training centers outside the organization for officer development or officer training, although the question, “Have you



obtained officer development classes outside of CFD”, was designed to include training that was not necessarily sponsored or provided by CFD. Many employees have obtained this training on their own personal time or by affiliation with other organizations. Results showed that overall, 70 (38%) of the employees have obtained this outside training. Results further demonstrated that 4 (67%) of the Asst. Chiefs, 18 (48.6%) of the Captains, 12 (25.5%) of the Lieutenants and 36 (37.8%) of the fire fighters have participated in this type of training at various training centers.

Employees reporting outside agency officer development training showed that 26 (14.1%) employees have attended National Fire Academy (NFA) classes while 16 (8.7%) reported some type of Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS) developed programs. Additionally, West Virginia University – Fire Service Extension (WVU-FSE) and the Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) has trained 45 (24.5%) and 46 (25%) of the employees respectively. Another 8 employees reported other sponsors of officer training.

At the time of this research project, the administration of the Charleston Fire Department had acknowledged the need for a department-wide Officer Development / Orientation Program and had developed an in-house training program. This 40 hour program was recently completed by all administrative and training officers and the training division was developing a schedule in which all Captains and Lieutenants will undergo this training. A further description of this program will be discussed later in this paper.

Although several employees were unaware of the development and plans of this program the question, “Do you feel the Officer Development / Orientation Program will be beneficial?” was asked. Overall, 146 (79.4%) of the employees felt this program would be beneficial while 27 (14.7%) were undecided, another 11 employees reported no. All of the Asst. Chiefs reported

that this program would be beneficial, while of the Captains, 31 (83.8%) said yes, 2 said no and 4 were undecided. Lieutenant statistics showed 37 (78.7%) said yes while only one said no and 9 (19.2%) were undecided. Similar statistics for Firefighters were demonstrated with 72 (75.8%) agreeing, 8 saying no and 14 (14.7%) undecided on the concept. These figures may have been slightly distorted by the fact that several employees are not familiar with the content of the program and did not understand its purpose. Several respondents also commented on a past track record of training programs being implemented and either not completed or finished in a timely manner.

The questions on previous experience were somewhat vague but were designed to include any fire/EMS experience prior to being hired by the Charleston Fire Department; this included career or volunteer experience in either fire departments or EMS organizations. This included the previous experience by former CEAS employees. Organizationally, 95 (51.6%) employees reported that they had previous experience in fire/EMS while another 5 employees had experience as Law Enforcement Officers. Broken down to rank, 3 (50%) Asst. Chiefs, 11 (29.7%) of the Captains, 21 (44.7%) of the Lieutenants and 60 (63.8%) of the firefighters reported that they had this previous experience.

Furthering the question, “Has this experience helped prepare you for your current job?” resulted in a fairly predictable response. Of those answering yes to part 1, all 3 Assistant Chiefs and all 11 of the Captains with previous experience reported that it had helped while 18 (85.7%) of the Lieutenants and 58 (96.7%) of the Firefighters reported that the experience has helped for a total of 90% of those with previous experience.

The next question, “Has EMS experience helped develop your firefighting and officer skills?” was designed to gauge the ability of EMS training and response to improve

officer development. Statistics for this question were only compiled for the 91 officers answering. Overall, 43 said yes, 33 said no and 15 were undecided. By rank, two-thirds of Asst. Chiefs felt EMS has made a difference while Captains numbered 22 (59.4%) saying yes, 11 (29.7%) saying no with a remaining five undecided. Lieutenant responses were not as high with 17 (36.2%) saying yes, 20 (42.5%) saying no and 10 (21.3%) undecided.

In discussion, this question helped show the operational impact of the 10 year transition into a combined fire and EMS department. Many senior officers admitted that EMS duties had helped show them a better perspective of the job in general and helped the officers understand some of the issues faced by those performing these combined duties. The officers who are cross-trained to the paramedic or EMT level additionally felt that the training, in-servicing and re-certification requirements of EMS have helped them to keep their study skills and habits sharp.

The final question on the survey, “Do you feel the promotional testing policy of 70% test and 30% seniority is effective?” showed a near super majority of 65.6%, (122) employees reported yes. Although this figure is significant, another 48 (25.8%) said no and 16 were undecided. Again breaking down these answers to rank showed 2/3 of the Asst. Chiefs said yes while 28 (75.7%) Captains and 34 (72.3%) Lieutenants marked yes with the policy. Firefighters reported the most concerning figures 56 (58.9%) yes, 25 (26.3%) no and 16 (16.8%) remaining undecided.

This question provoked the most informal responses and discussion. Although a super majority reported that this process is effective, many of those felt the system could be improved. Several comments were made describing the promotional test as a nothing more than a memorization contest, but many agreed that the information contained in the study texts contained very valuable information about firefighting. Unfortunately these texts are only

studied every three years when a new test is announced and the testing material is inconsistent. The text and books are decided upon before each announced test and change from test to test.

Many respondents stated that there should be some type of skill or hands-on testing in addition to written test questions. Some felt that there should be more weight given to seniority while others felt more weight should be given to the testing. Several employees felt that the requirement of having two years in grade before being eligible for the next promotion was not enough and the time in grade should be at least five years in rank before promoting to the next level. These comments reflected the feeling that two years do not give adequate on the job training and experience. Although statistics show that currently there is a fairly consistent average of 5.7 years between ranks, they also show that many employees have moved up the career ladder quickly.

Several additional discussions about the testing process also surfaced relating to a perception of fairness. Captain Jeff Tincher (personal communication, May 29, 2006) added, "My son was lying in a hospital bed when the last Assistant Chief test was given, I walked in and answered C to every question and walked out; I never touched a book and scored a 51!" Others reported that they did not have an equal amount of time to study because they were on busier units than others. A review of recent Asst. Chief, Captain and Lieutenant promotional lists did not show a direct correlation with this concern, but it certainly can make an impact. Several officers shared that the college experience of learning how to cram for tests gave them the ability to score higher. A few others felt that younger co-workers learn easier and can remember better, while a few felt that additional life responsibilities such as family and home issues distracted them from studying.

Several discussions also arose about the cut-off and how that it needed changed, the cut-off is 70% of the overall weighted score. Many felt the cut-off should be 70% of the written, un-weighted score. An example was given that on the Captain's list a few years ago, a Lieutenant answered 4 questions and left. He was next to be promoted when the list reached its three year time limit, demonstrating that sometimes test scores and text comprehension may not be as valuable as many may believe.

#### *New Officer Interviews*

"New" officer interviews were conducted with all officers that had been promoted within the last two years; four Assistant Chiefs, seven Captains and 13 Lieutenants. Answers reflected the personal opinions of those being interviewed. Many answers given were consistent among the ranks, but there were some variances due to the differences in responsibilities and duties of the various ranks.

The questions dealt with promotional reasoning, education, previous experience, EMS experience, experiences since being promoted, preparedness, training and assignment.

The first question, name 3 driving forces that have motivated you to get promoted, resulted in a variety of answers but all interviewed except one named financial / income and pension planning as primary reasons. A few reported to get away from EMS units and focus on firefighting. Others named personal and career goals and job satisfaction as factors. A few related to proper timing in relation to career planning. Another frequent answer related to moving up the totem pole with having less supervisors and more control while at work leading to the feeling that they could do the job better than others. A new challenge and changes in duties was also reported.

Next, “How has education or previous experience benefited your promotion?” gave fairly predictable answers however six (25%) reported no benefit. Of those describing benefits, most reported that education made a major difference in the general ability to study and learn the text material. Those with previous experience reported that they were more comfortable in not only the study and text knowledge, but had a better understanding of the job and the previous experience helped obtain considerable on the job training, especially of learning from past mistakes and including trial and error.

The question, “How has EMS experience benefited your promotion or preparedness?” had a similar number (five) believing that it had not made a difference. Although, a majority reported an overall better understanding of the job and emergency services as a benefit due to having a better grasp on all around operations. Others described better communication and people skills; better decision making and problem solving abilities were also discussed. A few noted the change in overall call load shifting away from fires to EMS and the ability to better know the community and diversity.

The questions relating to experiences since being promoted were broken down to complications (negative or challenges) and positive experiences. Six reported that they had not experienced any major problems. A note must be made that a few of those promoted had only been in that new rank for a matter of weeks. A few acknowledged the conflict associated from dealing with those who had previously held their particular job, expectations and having their authority questioned and tested. Although, the clear majority discussed issues revolving around training, those issues were quite different among the three ranks. Training was further discussed in a later question. For the Lieutenants almost all mentioned the challenge of stepping-up to

“acting” Company Officer. A few others reported the challenge of not being familiar with personnel, apparatus and the new responsibilities they were exposed to.

Answers to positive experience also had a few reporting nothing major, but several discussed the support, compliments and confidence that co-workers (supervisors and subordinates) had given them. Others shared the positive experience of things working out well and successful mitigation of incidents. A few also mentioned a better outlook on coming to work and the feeling of being in the right job for them leading to overall enjoyment and comfort with work.

The question “How could you have been better prepared for your promotion?” led to many diverse answers that, again, ultimately revolved around training with all answering better and more training. A few comments included an officer development program and mentoring. Administratively, answers were given relating to being more familiar with basic management, budgets and city administration. Captains seemed to focus more on the lack of management and supervisor training and preparedness. Lieutenants also focused on general officer training and being prepared to “act” as the company officer.

“Do you feel a mentoring program could be beneficial?” had mixed results, most said yes, four said no and a few were undecided. Generally the impression was that it could help depending on how it was managed, who was doing the mentoring and what procedures and guidelines were given and followed. There were a few very interested in the concept and a few that were very skeptical that it would not be done right.

The question “How has swing or permanent assignment affected you?” related to the concept that almost all new officers begin swinging upon promotion. At CFD “swinging” means a different job, assignment and station every shift, depending on who is off. Captains described

both good and bad examples. Swinging gives more diversity and overall knowledge by the constant learning that comes with a changing environment. Although many described the difficulty of being in an unfamiliar area and the challenges of not knowing the crews and particulars that come with different stations, apparatus and response areas. One also described being a swing Company Officer was very familiar to being a substitute teacher and just being there. Lieutenants focused more on the familiarity with territory and apparatus with several claiming that you have to know the whole city, not just one area. Combined, the officers explained that being in a designated station gives more comfort and stability, but most did not mind swinging because of the learning and better knowledge base that it gives.

The final question, “What kind of training do you think would most benefit you now?” elicited various answers from the different ranks but did have some similarities. Common answers given seemed to revolve around computer skills such as NFIRS reports, completing forms and computer programs in general. Another common answer was about general tactics; both basic and advanced. Most officers also had concerns about not only the everyday routine training but also the “unusual” incidents that they are called to including auto extrications and various other rescues. Again administrative officers seemed to focus on city government, budget and management concerns and Captains and Lieutenants focused on tactics and explained that more training in general was needed.

#### *Administrative Interviews*

Administrative officers interviewed included the six Assistant Chiefs (the interim Chief, the Chief of Operations, the Administrative Chief and the three Shift Commanders). Also interviewed, was one of the three “on-shift” training officers and the EMS Coordinator. The President of Local 317 was also questioned speaking for the general membership. A total of 14



questions were given relating to a younger department with younger and new officers, formal education, training and prior experience. Specific questions regarding younger officers and training were also asked.

The first question, describe factors that have lead to a younger department, yielded very similar responses from all. A law passed several years ago, allowing for an earlier retirement age combined with increased salaries has led to employees being able to retire earlier with higher and more lucrative pensions. Assistant Chief Eugene Perry (personal communication, May 31, 2006) offered, “When I came on the job, guys were being forced to retire at 65.” Earlier retirements were also contributed to an increased work load, increased training standards and additional more responses like EMS and auto accidents. Assistant Chief Tim Belcher (personal communication, May 29, 2006) also added, “Long term lack of morale had also led to early retirement.” Better retirement planning, changes in the economy like working spouses and better health also have had an impact in people leaving earlier. Assistant Chief Rodney Winter (personal communication, June 03, 2006) responded, “After 50 it’s not worth it stay.”

Leading to the intent of this research, “Describe factors that have led to younger and inexperienced officers” offered various responses. Contributed with earlier retirements, rapid turnover with mass retirements and organizationally being younger were major factors discussed in regards to youth. In regards to inexperience, responses were varied but included thoughts that overall experience had reduced due to a decrease in fire calls, an increase in EMS and that experienced officers were not passing along the knowledge like they used to. Factors relating to training were addressed such as a lack of officer development, preparation and planning complicated by a lack of professional and self motivation.

“How as formal education and training affected promotions and job preparedness?” raised conflicting discussions about college education. Most administrators agreed that the workforce is becoming more educated overall and that improved salaries has made the job more attractive to college educated workers when compared to other middle income jobs. Assistant Chief Steve McClure (personal communication, May 26, 2006) commented, “Years ago the department was mostly veterans with little formal education.” Formal educations have also led to younger employees being able to study better and are scoring higher on tests creating for very competitive testing that has never been seen before. Asst. Chief McClure later added, “education levels are coming up, people are book smart but street dumb.” A few discussed that younger employees have a better aptitude for learning, greater initiative and a need for more information. Conflicting the thoughts of formal education, a couple addressed the issue that promotion has more to do with the type of person and not as much as to do with college classes and some people have a natural aptitude for reading and comprehension.

The question given to administrators relating to previous experience, “How has prior experience affected promotion and job preparedness?”, also brought similar responses. Most felt that previous experience did not really make much of a difference when getting promoted but it had major benefits afterwards, such as being more comfortable in the job, Chief Dan Shaffer added, “It brings OJT (on the job training) that cannot be taught.” Most administrators also agreed that even though people coming in have previous experience and training, they still have to be retrained, but they are not starting from scratch.

“How has CFD managed the issue of younger and newer officer?” garnered the same one word response from both Chief Shaffer and Asst. Chief Belcher, “poorly” they said. All administrators discussed the issue that CFD has struggled trying to address the problem. “It has

been acknowledged,” Chief Dan Shaffer (personal communication, May 22, 2006) added, “that was the first step.” Recently, the department developed an Officer Orientation program that will address many issues discussed in this research. The “in-house” program will be taught in conjunction with the Delmar Fire Officer I program. A manual for this program had recently been developed and printed; it will be given to all officers and the next 5 on the Lieutenant’s promotion list. In April 2006, all administrators participated in the initial course of this program and many positive comments were made during and afterwards. The CFD Officer Orientation course content is listed in Appendix D.

As of the date of this paper, the CFD Officer Orientation program had been completed and preparation was under way to coordinate its scheduling and implementation. Plans were also being discussed to select certain officers on each shift to serve as “mentors” and work with the new officers.

The next question, “What impacts have been experienced by younger and newer officers?” revealed some positive and several negative impacts. A positive impact was the energy and excitement of new and young officers that have forced the older officers to try to keep up and have pulled a few senior officers out of a rut and increased their participation and enthusiasm. Unfortunately though, the work ethic, or lack of, has led to issues of daily responsibilities and menial tasks not being completed. This may be a result of the officers not being prepared or knowledgeable of their duties. Additionally, immature decisions were being noticed, primarily due to a lack of experience or knowledge of how to react or handle a specific issue. Many young officers have not dealt with issues such as discipline and personnel matters and have not had good examples to learn from. Young officers seem to invent or experiment

with various leadership qualities. Younger officers also seem to become more frustrated when the administration is slow to meet their needs.

Asst. Chief Belcher added a different perspective about EMS in general. “A lot of our problems are because of EMS.” he said. Later explaining, “We teach them (younger employees) to be confident and make decisions; beat into them to take charge when they are on the ambulance, then we tell them to get on the back of the engine and shut-up.”

“How has younger and/or new officers impacted morale?” resulted in many comments about positive impacts. More interest in the fire service, training and doing the right thing without being beat down and ridiculed was mentioned. The younger guys also see that they have a chance to promote quicker and have a chance to make a difference in the department.

“How has younger and new officers affected training?” was a question to directly address the needs of training. A common answer admitted the younger officers have placed a greater demand and pressure on the entire training division and staff. There is an increased need for training and limited time frames to do it. There is also a greater need for training due to limited experience and on the job training. Younger officers are more demanding and also get frustrated when they have to wait. The training division has limited resources and has multiple training issues to attend to such as EMS in-services, mandatory standards to meet and a very large group of new firefighters. Funding for training was also addressed, Chief McClure shared, “It costs the department \$2000.00 a week to send a guy out of town for a week,” he further added, “and that does not include the cost of the class and travel expenses.”

A couple of administrators discussed another issue reporting there are a lot of complaints about not getting training but then they complain when they have to do it, although, it was agreed by most that the younger officers are more apt to train and more excited about it. There was also

a concern that when someone is not familiar with how to handle an issue they tend to act like they know and fake it, leading to dangerous situations.

All administrators again discussed the new “Officer Training” program and were very confident that it would be a great benefit and address many issues that have surfaced. A couple concerns were related back to the issue of tactics, noting that the officer books contained very little information on tactics.

The question, “How has younger and new officers impacted the overall workplace environment?” also raised some concerning discussion. “It has become the norm to have young officers.” Chief Shaffer explained. A lack of respect from other employees was also mentioned leading to a lack of discipline; lack of structure and an overall “looser ship” were other answers given. A lack of or potential lack of confidence in the officers was also mentioned by a couple Asst. Chiefs and many do not have enough experience to be assertive. Another answer led to a discussion on the relationship between the fire department and the current city administration being better than it had been in years. The previous city administration created a lot of morale problems and uncertainty.

“How can retention and years of experience be extended?” elicited several responses questioning the concept. Many agreed that “20 and out” was plenty and that the job is hard on those over 50 years old and it’s a young person’s job. A few administrators also mentioned that there may come a time that the state pushes for changes in the law either to increase the retirement age or years of service to make the pension system more solvent.

In reference to the disabilities given out over the past 10 years, there were several responses that briefed on a health and wellness program, mandatory yearly physicals and agility tests. Several were also interested in a study into all disabilities and see if there were any

similarities or trends that could be addressed. The C-PAT physical agility test given to the last few groups of new hires has also made an impact by weeding out those who were unhealthy to begin with.

In reference to the resignation statistics, concerns were voiced about why they had left; was it benefits and financial matters or was it dissatisfaction with the job? A few commented that improving benefits and incentives, overall morale, employee happiness and job satisfaction may help. Maslow's Theory was also mentioned a couple of times.

The question, "How can officers and officer candidates be better prepared for promotion?" returned the discussions back to training. Mentoring programs and better training were common answers. Another possibility discussed was to start officer training from the very beginning. Asst. Chief Belcher explained the transition, "Being an officer is not chopping a hole in the wall, but getting a hole chopped in the wall."

Asst. Chief McClure went into great detail explaining the plans that the administration had been discussing and that it would make an impact in a few years. The plan that had been discussed was continuing the firefighter's apprenticeship program an extra year and including the NFPA 1002 Driver/Operator standard and the 1021 standard for level 1 fire officer. This requirement would ensure that everyone would meet the basic needs of driving and riding the seat at about the same time they were becoming eligible for their first Lieutenants test opportunity.

Asst. Chief Randy Stanley discussed the need to standardize the text used by the fire department and intertwining them with the Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs). Different authors on the same subject matter have slightly different tactics and views (Stanley, personal communication, May 26, 2006).

The next question related to the age diversity on the department asking, “Describe the differences experienced between Generation Y (under 25), Generation X (25-35) and those over 35”. Although these numbers were slightly off from the numbers provided in the reference texts, they still elicited the same discussions. This question garnered several different answers but of all questions asked, this question seemed to provoke the most thought before answering. A few responded that most people hired are in their mid to late 20s.

Answers given specifically to Generation Y inferred that these employees lacked work ethic and responsibility and did not like to follow the rules. Comments were also made that Generation Y was a good name because these employees question everything and want reasons. This generation was referred to as the entitlement generation for they expect everything to be given to them. Also discussed was their technical and computer abilities, “They can’t start a chainsaw or swing an axe, but they can fix my computer when I crash it!” responded one Assistant Chief.

Generation X was described as “starting to figure it out” with gaining experience and responsibility. One Asst. Chief pointed out that those in this age group seemed to act as those they were around, describing them as being immature when with the younger guys and being more mature when with older employees.

When discussing the older generation, comments were made reporting that they are set in their ways and are resistant to change. One comment focused on a perceived resentment of younger employees for various reasons; and another answer highlighted that the older generation has more hands on skills with more life experiences and was not afraid of manual labor.

The question, “How have these differences effected the workplace environment?” was designed to bring the previous questions altogether. Many of the answers reflected previous

answers given such as a lack of responsibility and difficulty getting menial tasks (such as mopping floors) done; although answers also reflected the increased energy and constant activity seen. Another contradictory difference noted was a small improvement in morale, but significant decline in overall discipline. Asst. Chief McClure summoned it up, “A lot has changed, but a lot has stayed the same; 20 years ago, you’d find everyone at the card table, now they’re piled around an X-Box playing video games.” On a more serious note, Chief Shaffer pointed out that there was a lot of communicating between peers and rumor spreading but there was a lack of passing on important information like there was in years past.

The final administrative interview question, “Describe changes that may need to be in the promotional process”, had many varied answers, but essentially revolved around the same topics of improved training, mentoring, planning, and preparing employees from day one. A few felt that maybe the 70/30 percentages should be looked at and maybe even looking at time in rank. A few felt that individuals should have five years in a rank before going to the next level because of the lack of experience being acquired due to the shift in responses. A couple officers discussed hands on or practical testing in addition to texts and one administrator emphasized the need to make the books more consistent and not changing them every test.

### Discussion

The impact of young and new officers within the Charleston Fire Department is a much greater issue than the surface shows. Making the leap from buddy to boss is not as easy as it seems (Lasky, 2004). The impact goes much deeper and much broader; this applied research project opens up many ever-present issues that only become visible with the youngest and newest of officers. An officer whether the company officer or “acting” company officer is the



building block of the fire department's future. The company officers have been identified as the ones who get things done and set the tempo for the organization (Bell, 2006, p. 35).

The Charleston Fire Department has many officers that are relatively young and do not have significant seniority within CFD or significant time in their respective positions. This has happened for a variety of reasons and many of those reasons were exposed through this research. With the lowering of the retirement age and the concurrent increase in retirement allowances, institutional knowledge is exiting the fire service at a rate unheard of even a few years ago (Sager, 2005, ¶ 2). There may be ways to slow this trend, but fire departments across the country are growing younger everyday and are dealing with younger officers and officers new to their positions; Charleston Fire Department is not immune to this change.

In 2004, there were 117 Line of Duty Deaths in the United States. 53 (45.3%) of those fatalities were over the age of 50. Causes and factors aside, careful consideration should be given when discussing any attempts to retain employees past the time in which they are eligible to retire.

The statistics gathered for this research shows the problem may not look that bad, but they also show the trend is only beginning. "The fire service is neither a sprint nor marathon; it's a long distance relay race. Each generation of fire chiefs and officers passes the baton on to the next. There's a lot of baton passing going on these days (Sager, 2005, ¶ 1)." The race is underway in Charleston and rounding the next turn. The fire service and its officers need to improve this sharing of the baton and pass along information obtained through combined experiences. Unfortunately, we are not good at sharing (Barna, 2004).

Although, the members of the fire department have struggled with balancing inexperience, training and leadership changes, the administration acknowledged the struggle and

identified some ways to address the problem. There is more work to be done and more issues to address. Education, training and experience are three major components of an effective fire officer's program (Nugent, 2004).

The various impacts of young and new officers to the fire department, to firefighters and to the community again revolve around education, training and experience. Those impacts can be grouped into morale, departures and turn over inside the fire department, attitudes toward training and formal education and most importantly the attitude of the department being a profession, much more than just a job or a paycheck. Young and new officers are the ones who can set the tempo for a change in those attitudes.

The primary factor that has led to young and in-experienced officers is directly related to firefighters and officers retiring earlier than years past leading to an overall younger workforce without significant experience. Fire-related experience levels have also reduced due to the decrease in fires and the increase in EMS type responses. Formal education, by teaching self-learning and better study skills, has allowed for a more intellectual and educated workforce that has increased the potential for employees to climb the career ladder quickly by relying on text comprehension and test scores for promotion. Previous experience has added to the general job related knowledge and experience levels of new officers, but has not had a large impact on their rate of promotion; although, this previous experience has allowed some less senior officers to be more comfortable with the job, make better decisions and ultimately benefit the community. In addition to increased interaction with the public, EMS experience provides all employees greater exposure to various emergencies and problem solving. The attendance of structured training has also served to benefit the department and community by teaching knowledge and skills in a controlled environment; skills that would take years worth of trial and error to learn. Fire chiefs

should not allow officers who do not take advantage of training courses into command positions (Sager, 2005, ¶ 13).

Many departments are setting their officers up for failure by not providing basic job skills necessary for a supervisor in the fire service today (Sargent, 2001, p. 51). Historically, CFD has not managed the issue of young and experienced officers well for it has not been a common and obvious occurrence. In recent years though, the occurrence has increased and the administration of the fire department has acknowledged a trend and has put plans in motion to reduce the related impacts by developing a Company Officer Orientation program and informal mentoring. There is no better time than the present to implement an officers training program (Rodriguez, 2004). The changes discussed for employees after completing the Apprenticeship program also demonstrates a plan to better prepare officer candidates in the future.

The infusion of younger and less experienced officers have placed more of a demand on the training division and have forced an evolution in training concepts. This infusion has also led to many discussions and, ultimately, has forced all officers to be more aware of the relative concerns and become more proactive in passing the baton of knowledge, skills and abilities. A greater emphasis has also been placed on organizational planning.

The overall workplace environment has become more proactive, energetic and focused on emergency services in general becoming more of a multi-hazard response agency than in years past. Morale has improved a little in regards to training and non-emergency activities, although there are still several morale related issues (not addressed in this research) that desperately needs to be researched, discussed and mitigated. Although there are always a few “unhappy campers” who drag morale down, the overall morale on the department has improved. It is difficult to give concrete and definite reasons; some believe a factor is the improved relationship between

employees, fire department management and city administration. The desire for training and the willingness to participate has improved as a result of this energy created. Many of the new and “younger” officers realize they have many years of service left with CFD and are not trying to “bide their time.”

Considerable information was obtained through this research that will assist CFD administration and the workforce to view statistics and take a closer look at the issues addressed. This information will allow the fire department to assess, plan for and minimize or improve these impacts in the future.

### Recommendations

The recommendations to reduce and/or improve the various impacts of young and new officers revolve around three basic, fundamental and primary issues: training, formal education and experience.

The training division and staff are overworked and understaffed. The addition of personnel would make a major difference in providing more and improved training. Creating an additional administrative staff position for day shift would allow for an officer to focus on training and nothing more. This Assistant Chief level position would coordinate the three shift training officers and be able to focus on training for other administrators and Captains (company officers). The shift training officer could focus on the junior officers (Lieutenants) and firefighters. The creation of this position would cost approximately \$56,000 per year (0.417% of the annual budget)

An additional staff change to allow an assistant “on-shift” training officer would help reduce the work load by focusing on firefighters and the apprenticeship program, add efficiency

to the division and provide for a training/safety officer when the regular Captain is off. This assistant could be either a Lieutenant or senior firefighter; this assistant would come to the office from 07:00 to 17:00 each weekday and return to station assignment for the remainder of the 24 hour shift. This could be accomplished by re-assignment and replacing the shift position with overtime, although that would cost approximately \$80,700 per year. Another option would be to hire three additional personnel (one per shift) and allow an engine company a full compliment of four personnel during the last 14 hours of a shift. This concept would cost approx. \$96,000 (0.714% of the budget).

Another training related recommendation is to budget one 24 shift of training leave for each officer per year. This one shift could be used by the officer to take training outside of the department. An employee would only be able to use this leave for approved courses meeting standards set by the administration and relating to one's duties. This one shift could be coupled with either annual leave or a "Kelley Day" to equal a full week off. An option of rotating this leave time from year to year would allow officers to borrow or trade leave time from another officer and be able to attend one week courses without using another type of personal leave; this concept would require accurate record-keeping to ensure all officers go to this officer training within a specific time frame. The attendance of "on-campus" National Fire Academy courses would greatly reduce the other associated costs. The NFA is in the process of changing ten of their two-week courses into six day programs (Dr. Denis Onieal, personal communication, January 18, 2006). NFA classes such as Advanced Safety Operations and Management (ASOM), Command and Control and Fire Protection Systems for Incident Commanders would be an incredible asset to CFD officers. Fire chiefs need to demand that all officers attend

fireground command training and ICS courses (Sager, 2005, ¶ 13). This recommendation would require an additional \$63,000 in the annual budget (0.469%).

Increasing formal education is a necessary recommendation. Ideally, requiring a minimum of an Associates Degree to be an officer would make a great difference in “non-emergency” situations. Unfortunately, this would require a change of WV State Code and would likely meet heavy resistance. The foundation for this recommendation is already available with the existing Occupational Development degree program and a few colleges are interested in following the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education Strategic Direction (FESHE) recommendations and creating a true A.S. in Fire Science program. CFD could also re-establish the “in-house” core class program with West Virginia State University (formerly WVSC).

Another recommendation that would meet heavy resistance and legal difficulty is to change the WV State Code which requires two years in grade to take the next promotional exam to three years. This change would ensure that all officers obtain more experience before promoting to the next rank.

Mentoring is another area where modification is needed. The establishment of a coordinated and planned mentoring program with written goals, requirements and evaluations is highly recommended. Informal mentoring could be easily changed into a formal and effective mentoring program that can withstand change and evolution.

Transition for officers also needs to be looked at a little more closely, especially for Lieutenants. A common challenge noted by nearly all Lieutenants is the fact that due to various circumstances, they have “stepped-up” to acting Captain positions within a couple of shifts of being promoted to driver/operator (Lieutenant). A recommendation would be to not allow any “new” Lieutenant to ride the seat “act as Company officer” for a minimum of three months after

being promoted. This may prove difficult in scheduling, but will allow for a period of adjustment and time to become more confident and comfortable with their new duties and responsibilities.

To further make recommendations on the promotional transition, all newly promoted Lieutenants should spend their first two weeks at Station 1 spending a couple of shifts on each, Rescue 481, Engine 451 and Truck 461. This would require the regular Lieutenant to ride in another seat, but would make it possible for the new Lieutenant to spend time familiarizing and reviewing equipment, operations and the duties associated with that apparatus. On scenes, the regular Lieutenant would serve as an assistant or rather, “third base coach”; the coaching officer would also help the new Lieutenant learn the particulars of the frequent alarm panels and key (access) locations for the busiest area of the city.

For Captains, the same concept is recommended, spending at least two weeks with another, senior Captain. The regular Captain could slide over to the driver’s seat and allow the new Captain to function with the security of a “coach” right next to them. Although, Station 1 is usually a little busier, Station 2 may be a little more appropriate for the new Captains. They could spend a time with the Shift Commander reviewing Standard Operating Guidelines and learning computer programs. Costs associated with this recommendation will be minimal, essentially just the daily difference between the ranks approx. \$36 per 24 hour shift, with an average of \$2160 (0.016%) budget difference (12 promotions) per year.

The establishment of a thorough and proactive health and wellness program complete with annual physicals is a recommendation that will not only ensure an employee visits a doctor at least once a year, but will demonstrate an organizational commitment to health and safety. This recommendation would cost approx. \$19,200 per year (0.14% budget increase).

The company officer orientation program recently developed by the Charleston Fire Department should meet many of the needs for all officers, especially those that are young and new to their position, although it is text and not hands on experience. Continuation of the recently developed Post Incident Analysis (PIA) will help learn hands on experience better; this PIA approach should also be used on other types of incidents and situations as well. Asst. Chief Belcher attempts to meet with all companies on his shift on Sunday mornings and provides an excellent information sharing opportunity. The use of this “Sunday School” approach on all three shifts would be beneficial to all.

Standardizing the text used for promotional exams would give senior employees a greater advantage in being promoted; all employees would know what texts to learn and study a few years in advance instead of a 60 day notice. Additionally, this would standardize the information learned over the years. The only difference may be newer text editions.

A final recommendation is the most cost efficient but the most difficult to plan, develop and implement. The recommendation is an improvement in overall morale and employee attitude towards the job being a profession. This attitude encompasses everything from coming to work on time to treating another (co-workers and citizens) as you would your grandmother to insisting upon intellectual and job related training.

Costs annually for these recommendations total \$236,360 per year which would require a 1.759% adjustment in the annual budget. An immediate change of this magnitude may not be feasible, but could be implemented over a few years by operational budget planning.

This research project should be re-produced very few years to evaluate various impacts encountered by the influx on new employees and new officers. Department statistical



information can be used to assess experience and education levels, as well as, anticipate and assess similar impacts in the future.

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## Appendix A – CFD Survey

### NFA – Applied Research Project – Kenneth W. Cline

The impact of young and new officers within the Charleston (WV) Fire Department.

(All information obtained will be kept confidential)

Name\_ (Optional)\_\_\_\_\_ Rank\_\_\_\_\_ Age\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Hire\_\_\_\_\_ Date of Last Promotion\_\_\_\_\_

Current EMS Certification Level (circle) None FR EMT Medic

College Degree (circle) None - Associates – Bachelors – Masters (field)\_\_\_\_\_

Total college hours \_\_\_\_\_ Colleges Attended\_\_\_\_\_

Are you receiving college incentive Yes/ No

Are you interested in completing a degree? Yes/No

Formal Education courses completed (circle) English Math Accounting Biology  
Chemistry other Science Humanities History Sociology Speech Computer  
Business Law Art Psychology Foreign language Other courses completed

What course(s) were most beneficial to you? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel formal education has helped you in your job? Yes – No – N/A

Do you feel formal education has helped you in studying for tests? Yes – No – N/A

What is your current comfort level in your position? very low - low - moderate - high - very high

How prepared were you for your current position? very low - low - moderate - high - very high

Do you feel the Officer Development / Orientation Program will be beneficial? Yes / No

Has EMS experience helped develop your firefighting and officer skills? Yes – No – N/A

Have you obtained officer development training outside of the department? Yes / No

National Fire Academy FEMA(DHS) WVU-FSE RESA other\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have previous Fire/EMS experience prior to being hired by CFD Yes / No

Has this experience helped prepare you for your current job? Yes - No - N/A

Do you feel the promotional testing policy 70% test & 30 % seniority is effective? Yes / No

Thank you for your assistance and input

## Appendix B - Interview Questions – New Officer

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Time in Rank \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

Name 3 driving forces that have motivated you to be promoted?

How has education or previous experience benefited your promotion?

How has EMS experience benefited you promotion or preparedness?

Describe any complications that you have experienced since your promotion?

Describe any positive experiences that you have experienced since your promotion?

How could you have been better prepared for your promotion?

Do you feel a mentoring program could be beneficial?

How has swing or permanent assignment affected you?

What kind of training do you think will benefit you now?

### **Assistant Chiefs Interviewed:**

*Dan Shaffer (Interim Fire Chief)*  
*Steve McClure*

*Rodney Winter*  
*Eugene Perry*

### **Captains Interviewed:**

*Richard Simmons*  
*Greg Morris*  
*Paul Crago*

*Norris Brooks*  
*Fred Dunbar Jr.*  
*Mike Robinson*

*Dave Wagoner*

### **Lieutenants Interviewed:**

*Les Smith*  
*Kirk Lilly*  
*Jeremy Starks*  
*Donnie Matthews*  
*Darin Virag*

*Brian Evans*  
*Trevor Dysart*  
*Pat Beets*  
*Craig Matthews*

*Brian Stiltner*  
*H.L. Clark*  
*Mark Strickland*  
*Johnny Droddy*

## Appendix C - Interview Questions – Administration

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_  
Location \_\_\_\_\_

Name factors that have led to a younger department

Name factors that have led to younger and inexperienced officers

How has formal education and training affected promotions and job preparedness?

How has prior experience effected promotion and job preparedness?

How has CFD managed the issue of younger and newer officers?

What impacts have been experienced by younger and newer officers?

How has younger and/or new officers impacted morale?

How has younger and/or new officers affected training?

How has younger and/or new officers impacted the overall workplace environment?

How can retention and years of service be extended?

How can officers and officer candidates be better prepared for promotion?

Describe differences experienced between generation Y (under 25), generation X (25-35) and those over 35.

How has these differences effected the workplace environment?

Describe changes that may need to be made in the promotional process?

### **Administrative Officers Interviewed:**

*Assistant Chief Dan Shaffer, Interim Fire Chief*  
*Assistant Chief Randy Stanley, Administrative Chief*  
*Assistant Chief Steve McClure, Chief of Operations*  
*Assistant Chief Rodney Winter, Shift Commander "A"*  
*Assistant Chief Eugene Perry, Shift Commander "B"*  
*Assistant Chief Tim Belcher, Shift commander "C"*  
*Captain Charles Overstreet, Training Officer "A"*  
*Lieutenant Craig Matthews, President, IAFF Local 317*

Appendix D – CFD Company Officer Orientation Program – Syllabus

## Company Officer Orientation Charleston Fire Department

Grant Gunnoe, Fire Chief

- I. Rules/Regs
- II. Forms
  - a. Review All Forms
  - b. Complete Monthly Activity Report
- III. NFIRS
- IV. Leadership I (self-paced study)
- V. Discussion
  - a. The New Co. Officer Part 1 and 2
  - b. From “Buddy to Boss”
  - c. Team Dynamics for the Company Officer
  - d. The Role of the Company Officer in Managing Diversity
  - e. Engine Officer Do’s and Don’ts
  - f. 25 Ways for Officers to Improve Company Safety

## Appendix E - Charleston Fire Department Statistics

Figure E.1 – CFD Rank Structure

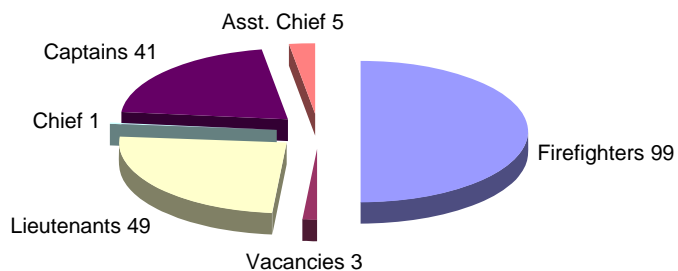


Figure E.2 – C.F.D. EMS Certifications

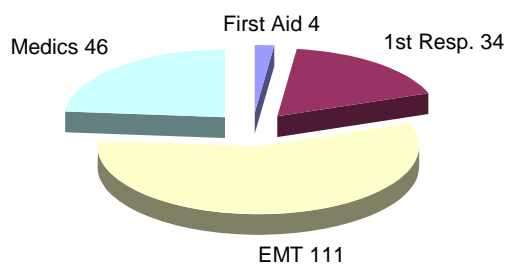


Figure E.3 – Employee Departures since June 1996

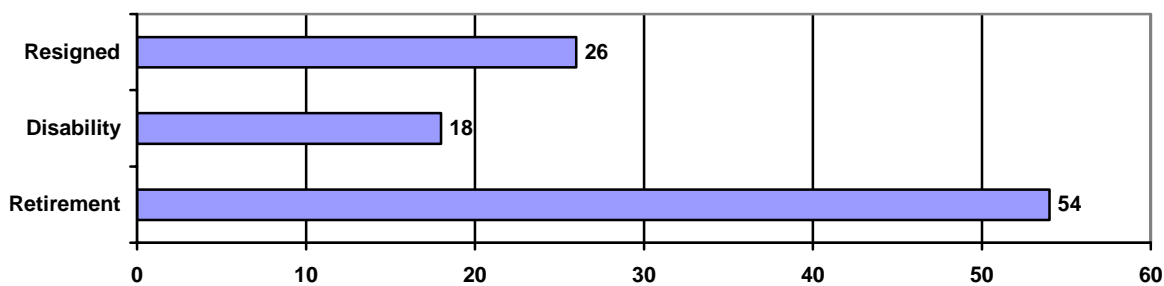


Figure E.4 – CFD Hiring since June 1996

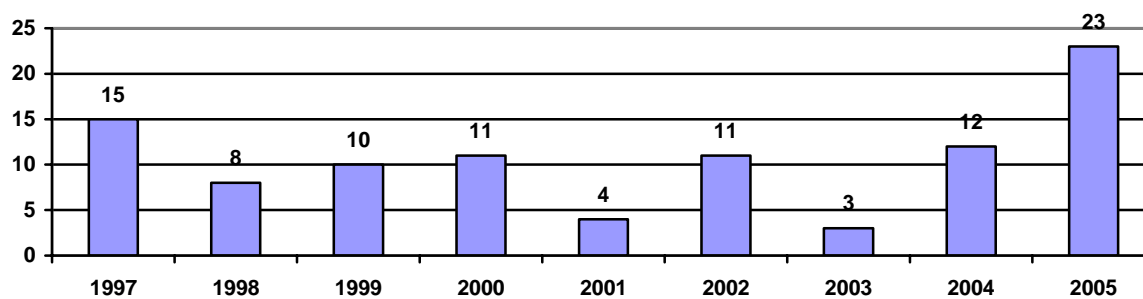




Figure E.5 – CFD Staffing Comparison June 1996 &amp; June 2006

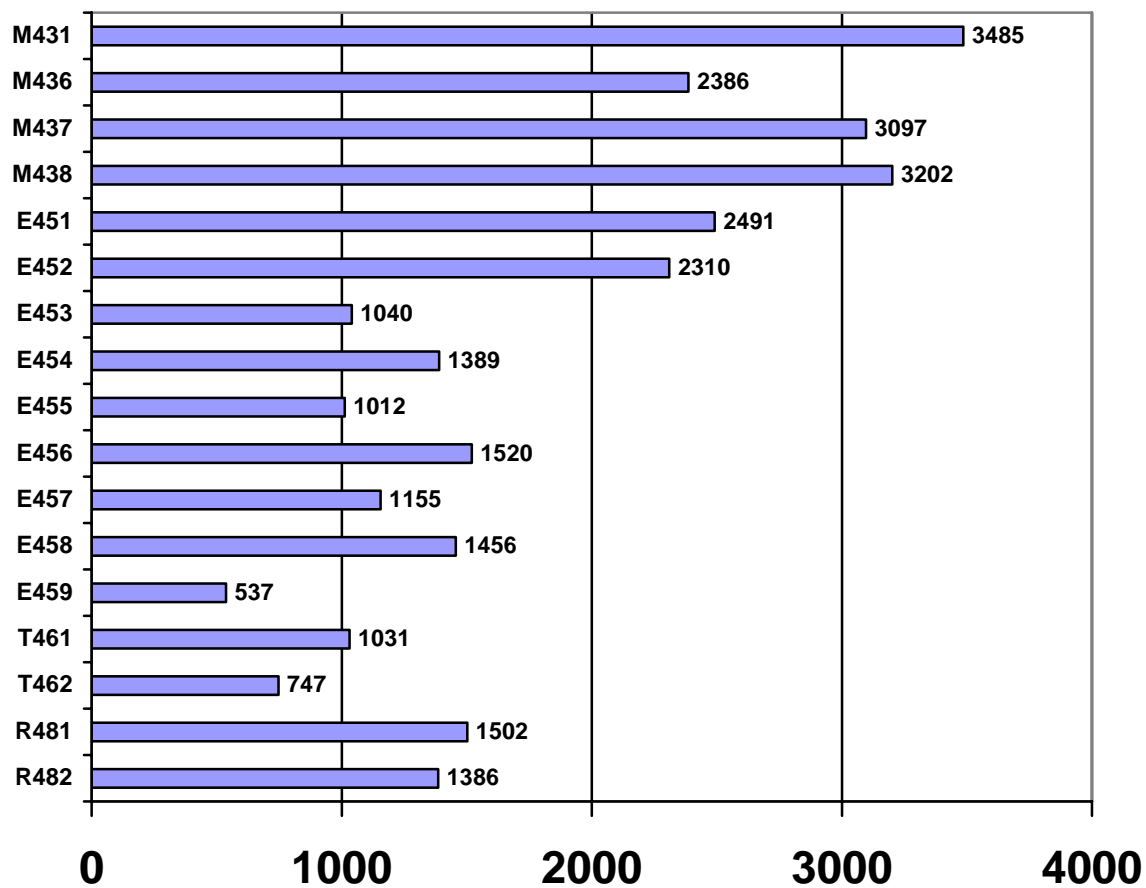
## Charleston Fire Department - Minimum Shift Staffing - June 1997

E451	E452	E453	E454	E455	E456	E457	E458	E459	T461	T462	T466	R481	R482	Total
4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	39
									M930	M931	M932	M933	908	450
									2	2	2	2	1	1
														10
														total
														49

## Charleston Fire Department - Minimum Shift Staffing - June 2006

E451	E452	E453	E454	E455	E456	E457	E458	E459	T461	T462	R481	R482	Total
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	36
									M431	M436	M437	M438	408
									2	2	2	2	1
												1	1
												1	11
													total
													47

Figure E.6 – 2005 CFD Responses by Unit



## Appendix F – CFD College Education Comparisons

Figure F.1 – College Experience by Rank

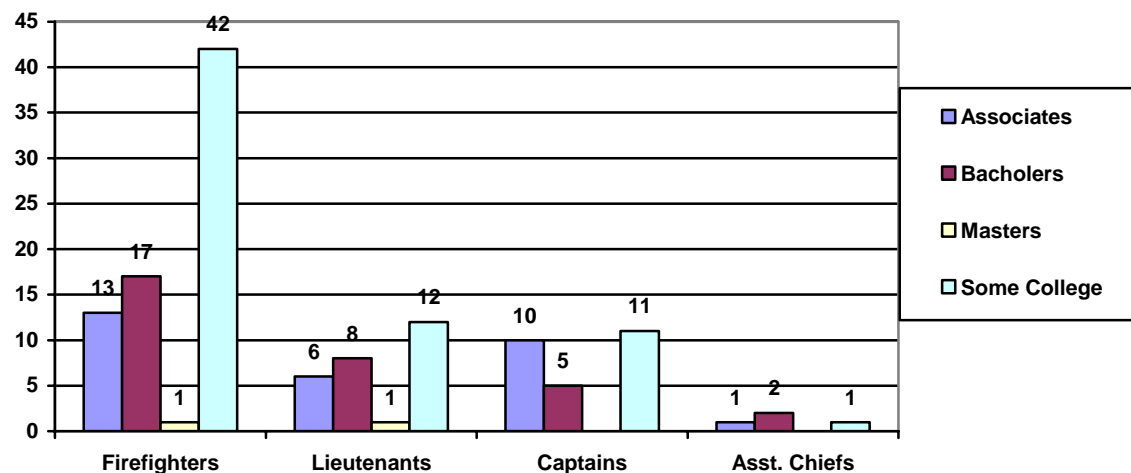
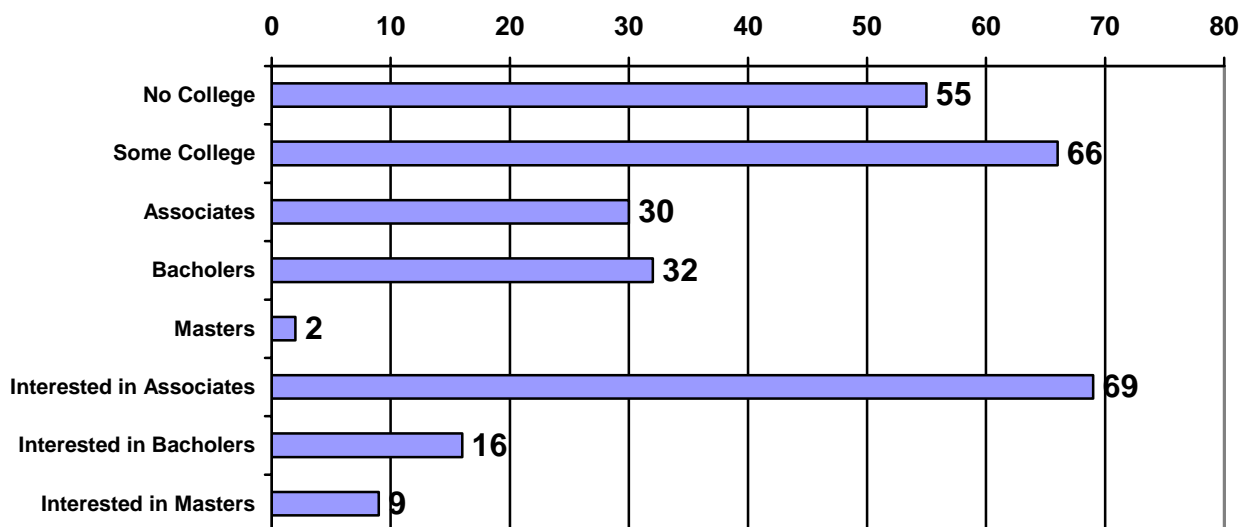


Figure F.2 – Overall College Experience and Interest



## Appendix G – CFD Age and Seniority Comparisons

Figure G.1 – Average Seniority by Rank – June 01, 2006

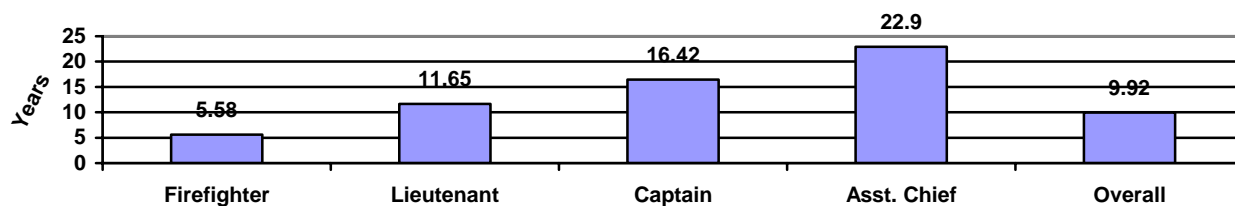


Figure G.2 – Average Age by Rank – June 01, 2006

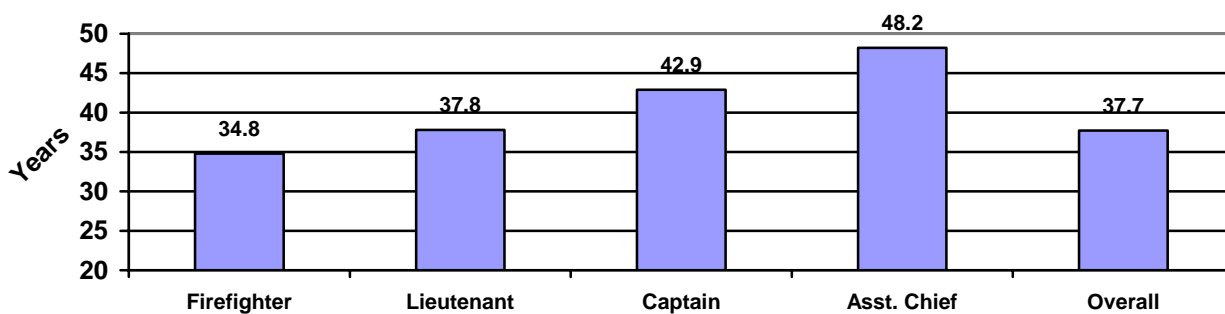


Figure G.3 – Age Groups by Rank – June 01, 2006

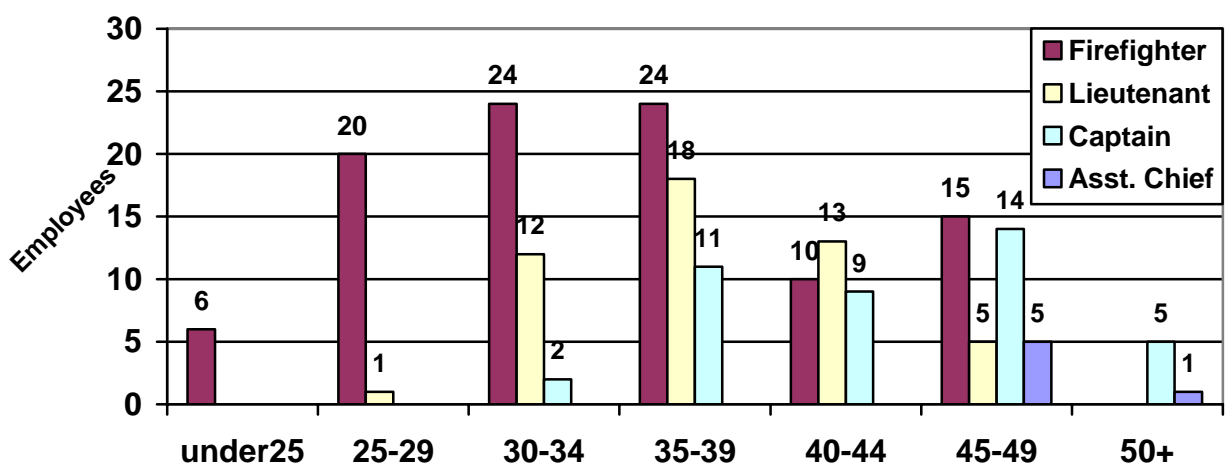


Figure G.4 – Ages of CFD Employees – June 01, 2006

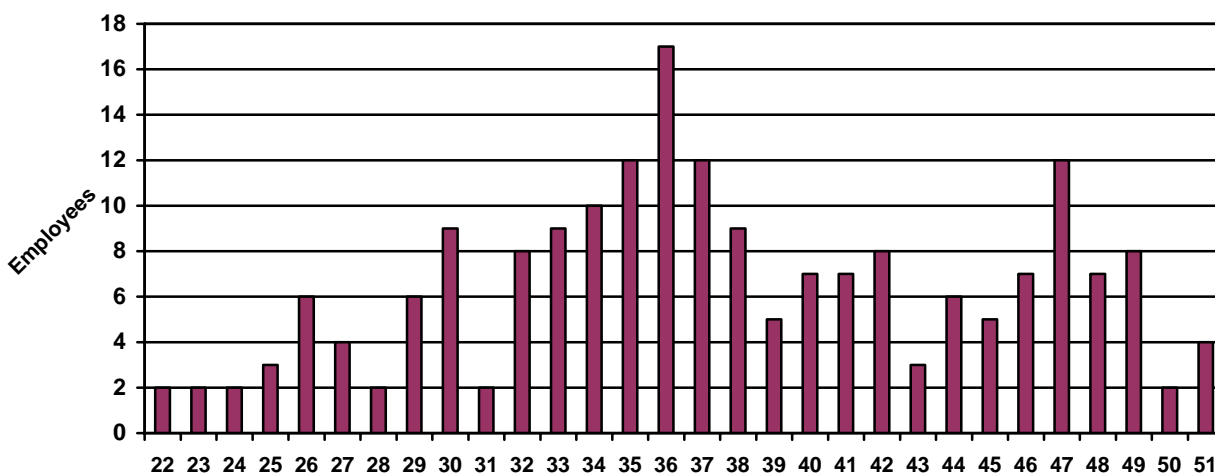


Figure G.5 – Seniority of CFD Employees by hiring groups – June 01, 2006

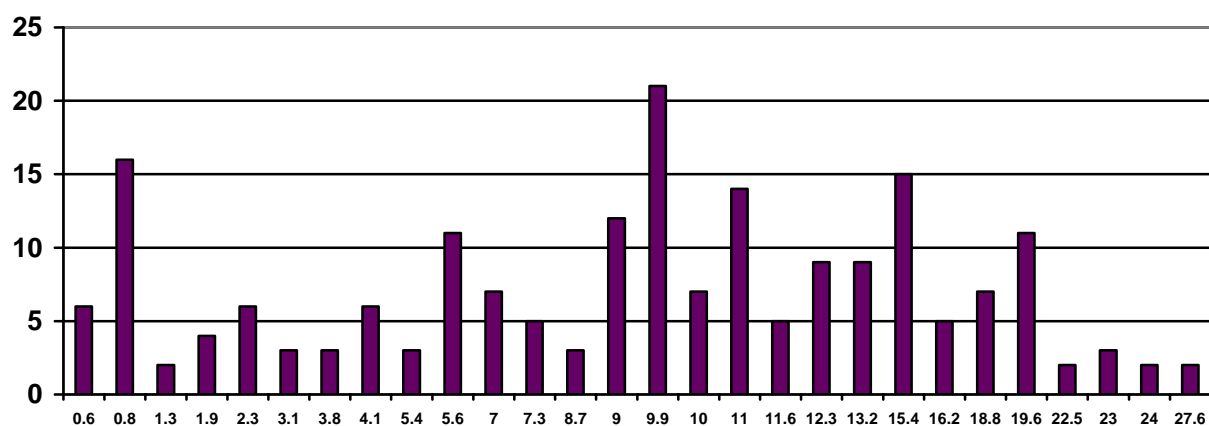


Figure G.6 – Assistant Chiefs - Age &amp; Seniority

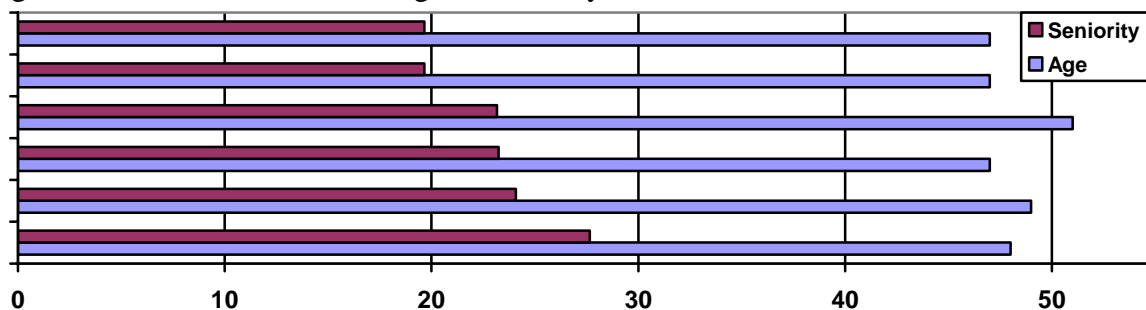


Figure G.7 – Captains – Age &amp; Seniority

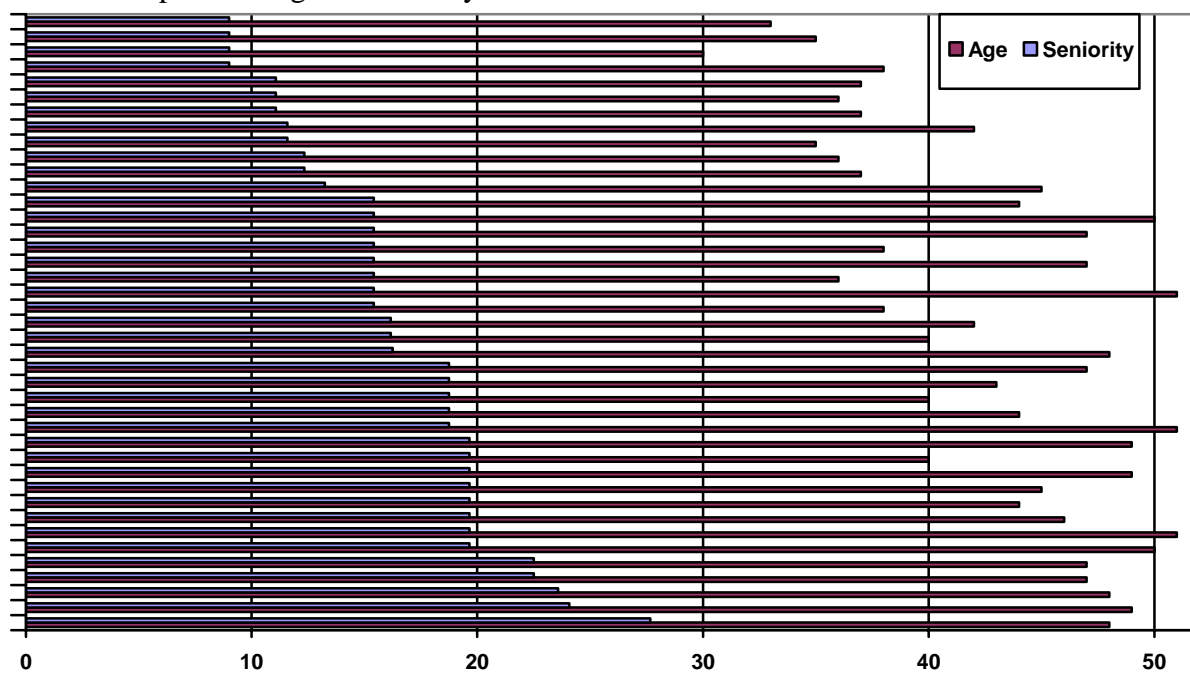


Figure G.8 – Lieutenants – Age &amp; Seniority

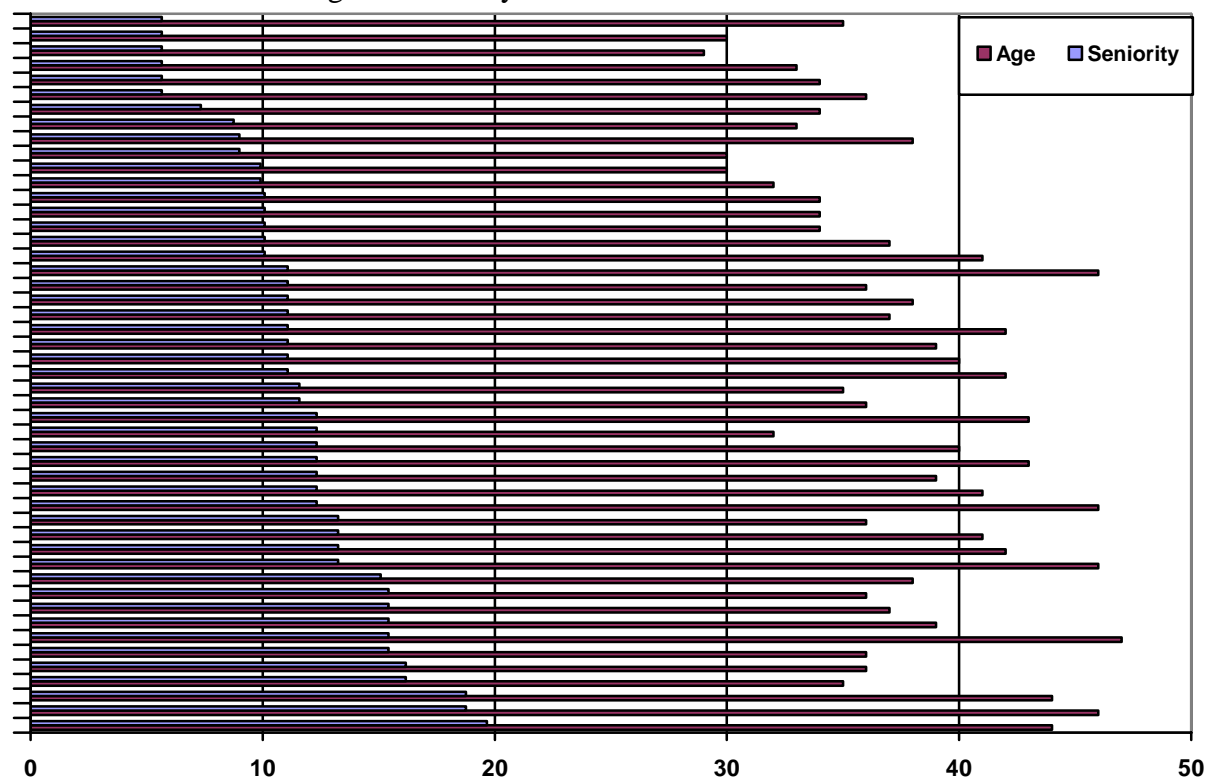
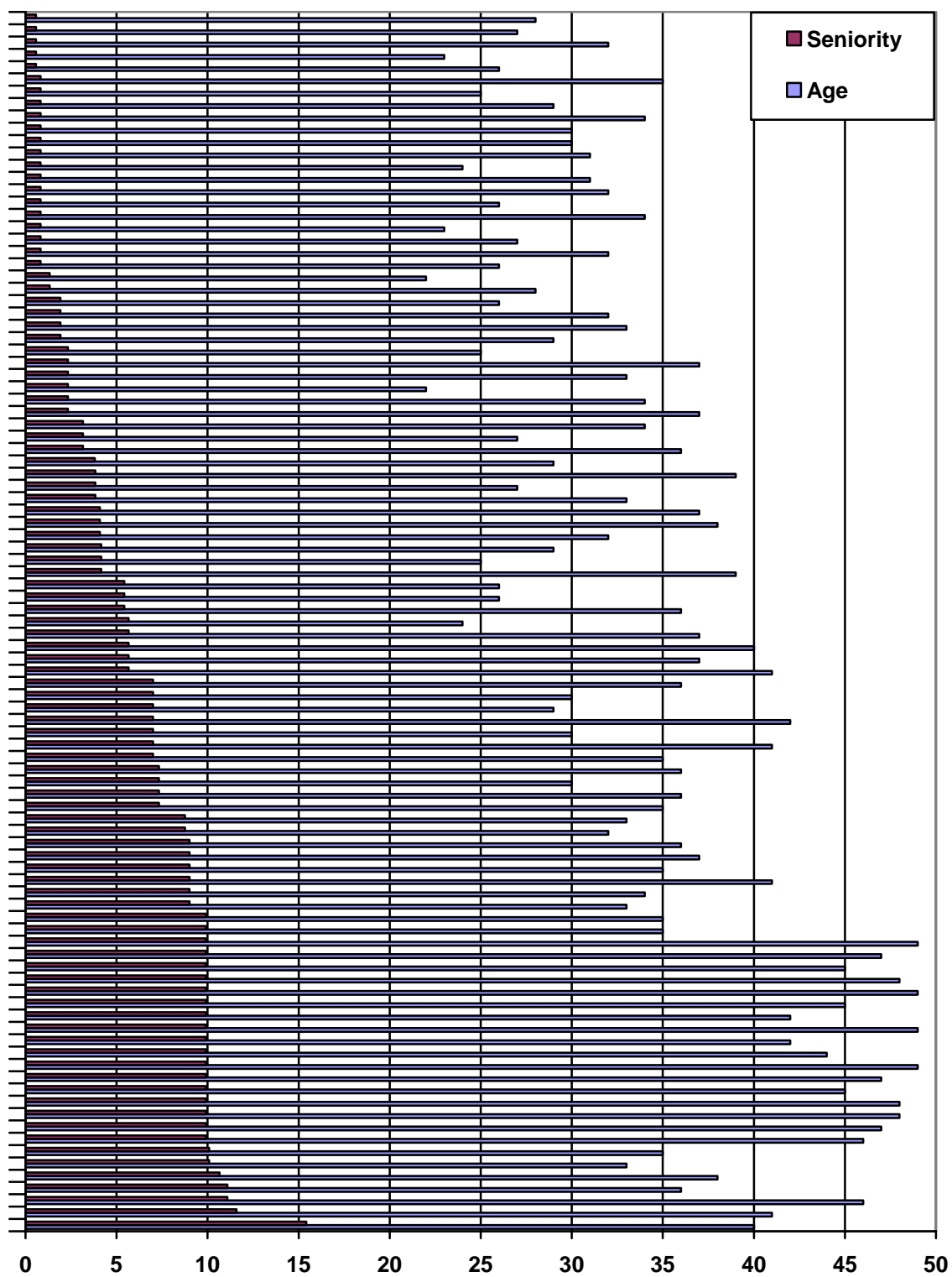


Figure G.9 – Firefighters – Age & Seniority



## Appendix H – CFD Survey Results

Figure H.1a - Do you feel formal education has helped you in your job?

Yes	104	No	33
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Figure H.1b - Do you feel formal education has helped you in studying for tests?

Yes	103	No	31
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Figure H.2 – What is your comfort level in your position?

	very low	low	moderate	high	very high
Asst. Chief					
Present			2	4	
When Promoted		1	4	1	
Captain					
Present			10	16	11
When Promoted	1	7	20	8	1
Lieutenant					
Present			12	17	18
When Promoted		10	21	12	3
Firefighter					
Present		3	25	36	29

Figure H.3 - Do you feel the Officer Development / Orientation Program will be beneficial?

	Asst. Chief	Captain	Lieutenant	Firefighter	Overall
yes	6    100%	31   83.78%	37   78.72%	72   76.60%	146   79.35%
no		2    5.40%	1    2.12%	8    8.51%	11    5.98%
Undecided		4   10.81%	9   19.15%	14   14.89%	27   14.67%
total	6	37	47	94	184

Figure H.4 – Has EMS Experience helped develop your firefighting and officer skills?

	Asst. Chief	Captain	Lieutenant	Overall
yes	4    67%	22   57.80%	17   36.20%	43   47.25%
no	2	11   28.90%	20   42.50%	33   36.26%
undecided		5   13.20%	10   21.20%	15   16.48%
total	6	38	47	91

Figure H.5a – Have you obtained officer development classes outside of C.F.D.?

	Asst. Chief		Captain		Lieutenant		Firefighter		Overall	
yes	4	66%	18	50.00%	12	25.50%	36	37.80%	70	38%
no	2	33.30%	18	50%	35	74.47%	59	62.11%	114	61.96%
total	6		36		47		95		184	

Figure H.5b – Training Center Courses Attended

NFA	26	14.10%	RESA	46	25%	other	8	4.30%
FEMA (DHS)	16	8.70%	WVU-FSE	45	24.50%			

Figure H.6a – Do you have previous Fire/EMS experience prior to being hired by C.F.D.?

	Asst. Chief		Captain		Lieutenant		Firefighter		Overall	
yes	3	50%	11	29.73%	21	44.68%	60	63.83%	95	51.63%

Figure H.6b - Has this experience helped prepare you for your current job? (Based on those answering yes)

	Asst. Chief		Captain		Lieutenant		Firefighter		Overall	
yes	3	100%	11	100%	18	85.71%	58	96.67%	90%	

Figure H.7 - Do you feel the promotional testing policy of 70% test &amp; 30% Seniority is effective?

	Asst. Chief		Captain		Lieutenant		Firefighter		Overall	
yes	4	66%	28	71.80%	34	72.30%	56	59.50%	122	65.60%
no	2	33%	9	23.08%	13	27.66%	24	25.53%	48	25.80%
Undecided			2	5.13%			14	14.89%	16	8.60%
Total	6		39		47		94		186	